



The QP Bookshelf Part 7:

# Collecting

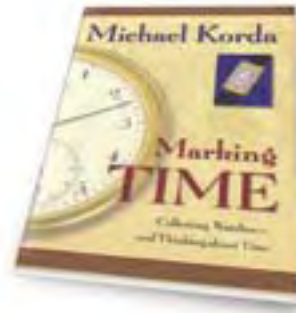
Three titles that explore the fanatical world of watch collecting come under QP's microscope

Ken Kessler



What gets us ticking? Why collect watches? And how on earth do we choose wisely? For the seventh and final instalment of the QP Bookshelf we have selected three widely differing books that go some way to answering these questions. You could argue that *all* watch books are about collecting, as they are aimed – for the most part – at collectors. The examples that follow, however, are neither histories, nor company profiles, nor price-guides; rather books about collecting *per se*. What they do is bring the QP Bookshelf full circle, by reminding us why we read *QP* in the first place.

Have no fear though: despite having covered what could be fairly described as a fantasy archive of watch books, *QP* will continue to review new titles as and when they appear, keeping you up to speed on what you should and – perhaps more importantly – should not be reading.



## Marking Time

By Michael Korda

Hardback, 198 pages. Price: US \$14.95  
Published by Barnes & Noble Books, 2004. ISBN 0-7607-3576-X

Korda – nephew of the great British filmmaker Alexander Korda – is a pocket-watch collector who just happens to be the Editor-in-Chief of Simon & Schuster and the author of more than a dozen books. Thus, we have in *Marking Time* a book that is actually as readable as a great novel... or anything else penned by a genuine writer, rather than a semi-literate enthusiast. Sub-titled *Collecting Watches – and Thinking about Time*, it is unique in that it tells you the how and why of watch collecting without ever becoming dry, densely fact-laden or blindly preachy.

In some ways, then, it is the antithesis of a guide, for you do not look to it for hard data; this book exists to entertain and beguile as much as it informs. Korda has filled its pages with a mix of autobiographical anecdotes, watch lore and common sense. He muses upon the nature of time, the mind of the collector, the romance of watches and the mystery of previous owners. If you love watches, it is, in the best sense, 'unputdownable'. Better still, it explains our passion in clear, non-anorakish terms. This book will not simply make excuses for your behaviour, it may even convert a few of your critics. Lest you think that I am suggesting that the book is perfect, note that it suffers the odd blunder. Either he or the proof-reader missed some trivial gaffes: Movado's purse watch is called the Ermeto, not the Ermerto, while the US magazine is called *Robb Report*, not *Robb's Report*. But these are minor and rare. *Marking Time* is erudite, elegant, entertaining and educational. And it is simply the nicest watch-related book I have read since Dava Sobel's *Longitude* (Fourth Estate, 1995).



## Collectible Wristwatches

By René Pannier

Paperback, 384 pages. Price: £9.95  
Published by Flammarion, 2001. English-language edition  
distributed in the UK by Thames & Hudson. ISBN 2-08010-621-X

An odd but charming book, this one. Its dimensions are roughly the same as a stack of three CDs in their jewel boxes, making it a fat little paperback, perfectly sized for you to peruse again and again. All that it contains is over 300 photos of funky, collectible watches, accompanied by brief descriptions. The photos are superb, the captions basic but informative, the selection eclectic; e.g. lots of Lip and Swatch, as well as obscure chronographs, plastic watches, electric and electronic watches. There's even one mechanical watch with a light built into the crystal.

No values are included to date or undermine the book – the Achilles' heel of price-guides with no relation to reality – and the basics of watch collecting and watch history are dispatched in the first 30 pages. This is simply a book to pore over for hours. It stands in stark contrast to the first-generation

collectors' guides of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which to this day, in their later editions, still contain blurry, indistinct (and therefore useless) black-and-white photos. I found my copy in the gift shop at Blenheim Palace and have seen it in museums, bookstores and art shops. Locate a copy for yourself. It is a genuine delight.



## Miller's Wrist-Watches – How To Compare & Value

By Jonathan Scatchard (Consultant)

Hardback, 160 pages. Price: £19.99  
Published by Miller's/Octopus, 2004. ISBN 1-84000-715-X

I write this review at the risk of losing my position at *QP*, for not only is the author a fellow contributor to this magazine, but *QP*'s esteemed Editor is a contributor to the book. And, good grief, is it a shambles. But let us back-up, so that I can put this wasted opportunity into perspective. Those of you familiar with the Miller's Guide series of antiques books know that it is a massively popular and influential range of titles for collectors. This is the sorely needed watch entry, joining a respected canon of books on porcelain, furniture and other established subjects, thus earning greater credibility for our beloved hobby. The book employs a wonderful format that breaks the subject down into precise and sensible categories, which are then explained through the use of glorious illustrations and lucid explanations. First you get a basic instruction, then a history of timekeepers by decade, then specific categories. In the case of this book, the latter range from information about the most collectible watch brands (Rolex, Omega, Heuer) to watch types (automatics, chronographs, etc).

Alas, the book is riddled with errors and is punctuated so poorly as to beggar the imagination. A few of the errors, for example: the watch identified as a 1941 Omega military model is the legendary 1953 with sweep seconds; the author contradicts himself on the date of the *Live & Let Die* James Bond Submariner on facing pages (how can a current model in a 1973 film be a '1960s' watch?); the early automatic Autorist is misspelled as Autowrist *and* the illustration points to the wrong lugs that wind it; the new Bugatti automobile is the Veyron, not the Veron; it is stated that all Rolex Explorers had black dials when there were definitely models with white dials; the IWC Mk 11, shown as a 1948 version, is post-1963, thanks to the T-in-a-circle on the dial (although, in the book's defence, it *could* be a 1948 with a replacement dial...).

As for the values in this book: if you can find IWC Mk Xs for £1,500, can you get me a dozen, please? Additionally, whoever possesses such an intrinsic fear of both commas and hyphens – be it editor, writer or both – I recommend they purchase a copy of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. But at least typos and poor punctuation can be tolerated. As for factual errors, these devalue the entire book. I suppose the lesson I learned from this 'guide' is simple: do not trust guidebooks.